

**James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, July 18, 1790, from
Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe Correspondence,
Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W. Gawalt,
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson

Albemarle July 18. 1790.

Dear Sir

My last from Richmond in ansr. to yours of the 20th of June has no doubt been recd. The more I have reflected on the subject, the better satisfied I am on the impolicy of assuming the state debts. The diminishing the necessity for State taxation will undoubtedly leave the national government more at liberty to exercise its powers & encrease the subjects on wh. it will act, for that purpose, and if that were absolutely a necessary power of the govt., and no objections applied to the transfer itself of the publick creditors from one govt. to the other, without their consent, (for such a modification as leaves them not even a plausible alternative, amounts to the same thing, & such I understand the report to be) or to the probable inefficiency of the national govt. comparatively with those of the States in raising the necessary funds, I shod. perhaps have no objections to it at present. Even in our time we may hope to see the whole debt extinguish'd or nearly so, & we must be the favor'd people, if no occasion should hereafter arise, that wod. make it necessary for the genl. govt. to tax highly, & raise considerable revenues. Such exigency can never apply hereafter to those of the States, so that merely for the sake of preserving an equality at present, I shod. think it useless to balance the debt, between them. But as I believe this (upon speculation only) a defect in the government, & presume thro that medium, the preponderance of one over the other, will be settled , I wod. avoid throwing any thing

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occasionally into that scale from which I apprehended most danger. On the other hand as the govt. now rests on its own means, for the discharge of its engagements, I woud. always use its powers for the purpose, nor woud. I endanger the publick credit rather than exercise a power, wh. was of questionable propriety, or in some

instances thought so. Thus things woud. have their regular course, proper experiments woud. be made and we shoud. ultimately be landed where we should be. The weight of all the State creditors thrown into the national scale at present, might also perhaps produce some disorder in the system, as it woud. occasion a fortuitous but severe pressure from that quarter, affecting them from the heart to the extremities, before either their legislators by moderate experiments, had acquir'd sufficient knowledge for the purpose, or the people given sufficient proof of what they could, and what they would bear. Will not this from necessity as well as policy, compell them to glean whatever they can from trade, pressing that resource upon trial likewise, beyond what perhaps for the sake of revenue, it can bear, & introducing a system of oeconomy in other respects very oppressive on some parts of the U. States: For in the present State of arts & industry in America, the moment that medium is pass'd, that forms the basis of a wise commercial policy for the whole, diffusing its beneficial effects to every part, will it degenerate into a tyrannous sacrifice of the interests, of the minority to that of the majority; and that precise medium which will be most productive in point of revenue & beneficial in other respects, can only be discover'd by gradual operation & gentle experiments, which the assumption, for the reasons above will entirely prevent. As to the residence I will only hazard one Idea. We find that for its removal to Phila. the representatives of that State rely on those of this, & the other southern States or some of them. They do not expect that the Eastern States will vote to remove it further from them-place it in Phila. & how doth this principle apply? Will our & their members harmonize so well afterwards, will they unite in forwarding it to Georgetown? Or will it not ra

ther immediately being about an harmony of sentiment & cooperation elsewhere? And shall we not be left dependant on a resolution of Congress which holds its tenure upon

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the pleasure of 8 States, who (whatever their true interests may be) have always shewn they consider'd it as consisting in keeping the seat of govt. as near home as they could. As soon as they get fix'd in Phila. (and the shorter the term allotted for their residence there the more active will this principle be) the representatives of that State will look with a jealous eye toward their brethren of the South. Any attempts to forward the erection of buildings at Georgetown will at first be recd. coolly & afterwards with disgust. Common interest in this as in other respects will unite them, and we shall soon find a well form'd plan, regularly pursued, that shall be best calculated to promote them. We have often found that an union on some great question, which was consider'd as primary or ruling in the view of parties, gave a tone to their proceedings on many others; how much more reasonable then is it to expect it, when there are so many predisposing causes to promote it? I shod. therefore wish to see the funds appropriated & comrs. appointed to carry on the work, plac'd as completely without the reach of Congress as possible afterwards, before we acceded to any thing upon this subject only; much less wou'd. I give a consideration for any thing less.

I hinted in my last I would mention to you a subject of importance to myself in cypher, but as you expected to return to France when you left it tis possible you omitted to bring it with you. As tis a matter which does not press immediately, and wh. perhaps you may conjecture, & tis possible we may meet before I come to any decision on it unless I have a private opportunity, I shall decline men

tioning it untill one of those events takes place. We are well & hope you are completely restor'd. I am with the greatest respect & esteem your affectionate friend & servant, Jas. Monroe

RC (Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress).